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## Antichrist's Revolution: Some Anglican Apocalypticists in the Age of the French Wars

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The article deals with the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century development of early modern English apocalyptic thought which permitted the identification of the Enlightenment and its political manifestations in Revolutionary France with the prophesied Antichrist. The importance of this phenomenon is discussed and a framework for further discussion of it, taken from general theories of apocalyptic, is provided. However, the article is chiefly concerned to go beyond existing, inadequate explanations of the phenomenon, which advert merely to the French wars and certain contemporary conspiracy theories, and seeks its origins and relationships in wider currents of British thought in the period and before. Notably, reference is made to the concern of the insular Counter-Enlightenment with rationalist christological heresy, the continuing vigour of the English tradition of apocalyptic exegesis and to contemporary renewed theological and pastoral emphasis on supernatural and dogmatic religion. However, popular thought is also adverted to and the phenomenon is situated within the history of the ideology of the British *ancien régime*. Throughout, the normality and acceptability of this apocalyptic thought in its contemporary setting is emphasized, implicitly suggesting a need to restrain historiographical emphasis on modernizing patterns of thought in treatments of the period.

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On the eve of the French Revolution, the established order in Britain faced no very substantial threats. The Whig opposition was already under strain, as a result of the regency crisis. The strident, if ineffective, calls for radical political change had almost wholly ceased. A change of front to assail the established religious order, an assault on the Test and Corporation Acts, was proving and would continue to prove ineffective.<sup>1</sup> Within a year and a half of the outbreak of the war with Revolutionary France, Pitt would break the opposition completely. At about the same time, he would crush with ease the radicalism inspired by the events in France. By the latter part of 1795 the

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1. C. Emsley, "The Impact of the French Revolution on British Politics and Society," in *The French Revolution and British Culture*, ed. C. Crossley and I. Small (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 31–62. See also J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1688–1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice During the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 335–46.

stage was set for Britain to engage in what could plausibly be depicted as her epic struggle in defence of Christian monarchy.<sup>2</sup>

That this easy triumph of the established order had strong underpinnings in political philosophy and that this in turn was underpinned by religious thought, has been acknowledged.<sup>3</sup> However, other aspects of the religious thought which contributed to Britain's ideological defence works in the period have received little attention. It has been widely noted that in Britain, as elsewhere, the period of the French wars produced a great upsurge of apocalyptic thought and writing, comparable to that of the mid-seventeenth century. Richard Brothers and Joanna Southcott were the most celebrated of the apocalypticists who claimed immediate, personal illumination. However, most made their utterances on the basis of biblical exegesis. Among these, there were those who greeted the Revolution with enthusiasm<sup>4</sup> and those who, if not actually supporters of the French republic, regarded it as the divinely appointed instrument for the destruction of the "part-Papal and part-Turkish" Antichrist. War against the republic was thus theomachy.<sup>5</sup> However, there were others who were prepared to modify the traditional Protestant interpretation of the prophetic writings substantially to ascribe a supernaturally evil character to at least extreme forms of Enlightenment thought and their political manifestation in Revolutionary France.

It is the beliefs of the most notable of these writers which are the concern of this study, which is intended to encompass explanation as well as description. Explanation has hardly appeared difficult. The revolutionary upheavals of the period, real and threatened, immediately present themselves as constituting that crisis which, it is held,<sup>6</sup> is always present as an initiator of apocalyptic expectation.<sup>7</sup> This explanation is not to be disputed. The apocalypticists themselves implicitly, in their extensive treatment of contemporary events,

2. E. J. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State: Early Industrial Britain, 1783–1870* (London: Longman, 1983), 57–61, 69–72. A narrative account of the developments mentioned in this paragraph, focusing on the radical movements, is given by A. Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

3. I. R. Christie, *Stress and Stability in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain: Reflections on the British Avoidance of Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), chap. 6. See also T. P. Schofield, "English Conservative Thought and Opinion in Response to the French Revolution" (PhD thesis, University of London, 1984). Much of the useful material in this has been published in T. P. Schofield, "Conservative Political Thought in Britain in Response to the French Revolution," *Historical Journal* 29 (1986): 601–22. For a treatment of popular anti-revolutionary writing and activity, see H. T. Dickinson, "Popular Loyalism in Britain in the 1790s," in *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century*, ed. E. Hellmuth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 503–33.

4. See, for example, W. D. Baillie, "The Reverend Samuel Barber, 1738–1811: National Volunteer and United Irishman," in *Challenge and Conflict: Essays in Irish Presbyterian History and Doctrine* ed. J. M. L. Haire *et al.* (Antrim: W. and B. Baird, 1981), 72–93, 81–3.

5. J. A. Oddy, "Eschatological prophecy in the English Theological Tradition c.1700–c.1840" (PhD thesis, University of London, 1982), 59–66, 66. See also J. A. de Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea: Millennial Expectations in the Rise of Anglo-American Missions, 1640–1810* (Kampen, Overijssel: J. H. Kok, 1970), 160–1.

6. B. McGinn, *Apocalypticism in the Western Tradition* (Aldershot, Hants.: Variorum, 1994), first arabic pagination, 10.

7. R. A. Soloway, *Prelates and People: Ecclesiastical Social Thought in England, 1783–1852* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 43.

and, on occasion, explicitly acknowledged that their works were addressed to those "who seek in vain for any other adequate explanation of occurrences so deeply interesting."<sup>8</sup> However, a very considerable historian of mediæval apocalypticism, Bernard McGinn, suggests that further comment is necessary:

Great historical disasters have had little or no effect on apocalyptic beliefs and movements: seemingly minor dislocations have assumed major roles. There are no general rules for understanding why some crises have been accompanied by a rich outpouring of apocalyptic expectations and others have not. We must begin from the . . . authors and find out (if possible) why they were predisposed to look for crisis; their interpretation of events is never mere reaction to external stimuli.

The present article seeks precisely to investigate the disposition of the orthodox Anglican apocalypticists of the last years of the eighteenth and the opening years of the nineteenth centuries. It is suggested that what is consequently seen serves to bear out further points about the apocalyptic crisis made by McGinn, in particular its possibly extremely protracted duration, to the point of its being constituted by a characteristic of the hitherto experienced human situation, and its ability to engender a conservative response.<sup>9</sup> What is obtained by a consideration of the origins and relationships of this instance of apocalypticism is some illustration of the content of the ideology — or more accurately political theology — of the English *ancien régime* and of the Anglican Counter-Enlightenment. The time was a crucial one for these traditions. There were the many circumstances which could have heartened their adherents, created both by indigenous British trends and negative responses to events abroad. Nevertheless these traditions were also approaching the most severe challenges.

## I

The extent of British anti-Enlightenment and anti-Revolutionary apocalyptic thought is not discussed here. Nevertheless, it is no doubt appropriate to comment briefly on its importance, which, it has been suggested, was considerable. J. A. de Jong points to the influence of the writings of George Faber, the vicar of Stockton-upon-Tees, in particular on Anglican missionary activity in the period and suggests, with contemporary quotation, a "general prevalence" of apocalyptic beliefs in English ecclesiastical circles. He points out though, that this development took some time.<sup>10</sup> F. C. Mather suggests a popular acceptance of such views by pointing to their wartime propagandistic function.<sup>11</sup> However, the impression of widespread apocalyptic belief in the Church of England appears to be derived mostly from the writings of the clergy and, in particular, the presence of such belief among the leadership of

8. Henry Kett, *History the Interpreter of Prophecy: or, a view of scriptural prophecies and their accomplishment in the past and present* . . . Vol. I (Oxford, 1799), vi–vii.

9. McGinn, first arabic pagination, 16.

10. De Jong, 189–93.

11. F. C. Mather, *High Church Prophet: Bishop Samuel Horsley (1733–1806) and the Caroline Tradition in Later Georgian Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 260.

the Church of England. It should be pointed out that this penetration of apocalypticism was hardly deep even among those most cited for their statements on the subject. Mather has shown that Bishop Horsley's interest was very considerable. Others' interest was much less marked. The bishop of London, Beilby Porteus, and the politically influential bishop of Lincoln, George Pretymann, did indeed read at least the work of Henry Kett of Trinity College, Oxford,<sup>12</sup> and in their charges to their clergy of the decade of the Revolutionary War did indicate a general belief that contemporary events had been "expressly foretold in the Word of God" and commend clerical interest in prophecy.<sup>13</sup> However, they would not venture to decide on "arduous points" of biblical interpretation<sup>14</sup> and express their own views on the subject. When he clearly had the opportunity, in his *Lectures on the Gospel of St Matthew*, to indulge in apocalyptic speculation, Porteus declined to do so. He devoted considerable space to discussion of the dominical prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, holding it to stand with the Resurrection as the chief demonstration of the truth of Christianity. Though he did state "that the forms of expression, and the images made use of, are for the most part applicable also to the day of judgment," he in fact confined himself to discussion of its fulfilment in the first century of the Christian era.<sup>15</sup> Pretymann-Tomline (as he had now become) moved on quickly and devoted his charges of 1803, 1806 and 1809 to a matter apparently more pressing, as indeed it was, than the approaching apocalypse — the refutation of Calvinism.<sup>16</sup>

It seems best for the present, if a general statement is to be made, to acknowledge that while apocalypticism did constitute a noteworthy strand in the thought of orthodox Anglicans around the turn of the century, it would probably be exaggerative to speak of an apocalyptic movement among them. However, even if it is true that this variety of apocalypticism was not extensive, the phenomenon remains important in its effects on the growth of the missionary movement and on a more general phenomenon — the returning inclination to supernaturalism observable in the religious life of the period. It will certainly be accepted as a sign of this; but it is difficult to believe that it was not also a causal element. It is instructive to compare Pretymann's charge of 1794 with the later apocalyptically influenced text cited above. The former gave pre-eminence to an argument in mere political philosophy, supported with citations of Aristotle, Cicero, and William Wollaston, about the necessity of religion for the maintenance of government.<sup>17</sup> The latter repudiated this approach and particularly recommended the clergy "to make the doctrines of

12. Kett, 1:x-xi.

13. George Pretymann, *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Lincoln . . . in . . . 1800* (London, 1800), 8-13. See also Soloway, 38-9.

14. Beilby [Porteus], *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of London . . . in the Year MDCCXCIV* (London, 1794), 28-31.

15. Beilby Porteus, *Lectures on the Gospel of St Matthew: delivered . . . in the years 1798, 1799, 1800 and 1801*, 8th ed., Vol. 2 (London, 1805), 166-218 and 353.

16. George [Pretymann-]Tomline, *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Lincoln . . . in . . . 1812* (London, 1812), 5.

17. George Pretymann, *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Lincoln . . . in . . . 1794* (London, 1794), 9-13.

Christianity the constant basis of moral instruction." These doctrines he listed for them: original sin, the divinity of Christ, redemption in Christ, and the doctrines relating to grace.<sup>18</sup> It had never been altogether unusual for senior Anglican clerics to register protests against what is taken to be characteristically eighteenth-century religious discourse<sup>19</sup>; but such a conversion is noteworthy.

Whatever may be said of the extent and influence of anti-Enlightenment and anti-Revolutionary apocalyptic, the phenomenon remains significant in its capacity to clarify the thought patterns of which it was a part and register change in them. It is with this that the remaining part of this study is concerned. In other words, it responds to McGinn's demand to enquire into the predisposition to an apocalyptic interpretation of events.

## II

Explanation of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century predisposition to apocalyptic interpretation of contemporary history must begin by drawing attention to the enduring strength of what was referred to as the "enlarged interpretation" of biblical prophecy and especially that contained in the book of Revelation. Although Protestant writers like Grotius, Henry Hammond, the revered Caroline divine, and Jean-Jacques Wetstein, the distinguished biblicist, had preferred the so-called "contracted interpretation" which confined fulfilment to ancient history, the belief that it was modern and contemporary events to which the prophetic books referred was undoubtedly far more widely held. Whatever its intrinsic merit, its role in Protestant apologetic rendered it secure. Since the era of the Reformation, the ability of a convincing identification of the pope as Antichrist to cut the Gordian Knot of Protestant-Catholic debate had been much valued.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the struggle against the papal Antichrist had become a particularly English duty, which did much to establish this elect nation's early modern identity.<sup>21</sup> It is thus not remarkable that English ecclesiastics of the early nineteenth century were able to boast that "[i]n no country has the interesting subject of prophecy, in all its parts, been so ably and satisfactorily investigated as in our own."<sup>22</sup> And this was reference to the recent past and the present, as much as to the seventeenth century. For "[a]n apocalyptic interpretation of history, in which Britain stood in for Israel

18. Pretyma, *Charge*, 1800, 14–15.

19. H. D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1989), 21.

20. A. Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600–1646* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), chap. 2. See especially p. 98.

21. For a most readable and learned introduction to this topic, see P. Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Basingstoke, Hants.: Macmillan, 1988), chap. 1. Among substantial studies, first place should be given to W. M. Lamont, *Puritanism and the English Revolution*, 3 vols (Aldershot, Hants.: Gregg Revivals, 1991). See especially vols 2 and 3. Also useful is P. Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions From the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

22. *Christian Observer* 5 (1806): 614.

and its opponents were represented as Satan's accomplices, did not fade away in the face of rationalism in the late seventeenth century."<sup>23</sup>

This endurance involved adaptation. To Tudor and Stuart England's use of biblical prophecy as reassurance in the face of a Spanish or French Catholic threat, was added an interest in such prophecy as might be taken to "describe the growth of the British Christian polity and its commercial empire."<sup>24</sup> As to the influence of rationalism, it should be noted that apocalypticism seems to have been rather more prevalent among the Arian Dissenters, who, with their rationalist interpretation of scripture and rejection of ecclesiastical dogmatic authority, constituted the central boundary in the Christian-rationalist debate which was the English Enlightenment. Apocalyptic beliefs were central to the thought of Arians such as Isaac Newton,<sup>25</sup> William Whiston,<sup>26</sup> and Bishop Robert Clayton,<sup>27</sup> who all took a most profound interest in apocalyptic, as they were to that of their more radically heterodox and rationalist successors, the Socinians, such as Joseph Priestley.<sup>28</sup> In view of the English Enlightenment's strong continuities with the Puritan past, this is hardly surprising.<sup>29</sup> By virtue of the fundamental similarity of method and content on both sides, apocalyptic might be regarded as an area of peace in the Enlightenment's christologically centred, but enormously wide-ranging, debates. The notoriously Arian Whiston was as readily cited by the orthodox as the respectable Joseph Mede, the most famous apocalypticist of the seventeenth century, and Bishop Thomas Newton from the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

It was, indeed, the nature of the English Enlightenment debate which helped to maintain the interest in biblical prophecy. At each point along the continuum of the debate, the claim was made, even by the Deists, that Protestant Christianity was being defended on whatever grounds the apologist deemed still defensible in the face of rationalist criticism: and prophecy was as important to eighteenth-century apologetic as miracles, which is to say that it stood with the central support of the era's apologetics. Some accorded it a slightly

23. L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837*, 2nd ed. (London: Pimlico, 1994), 31.

24. N. Hitchin, "The Evidence of Things Seen: Georgian Churchmen and Biblical Prophecy," in *Prophecy: The Power of Inspired Language in History, 1300–2000*, ed. B. Taithe and T. Thornton (Stroud, Glos.: Sutton, 1997), 119–39, 126.

25. R. H. Popkin, "Newton as a Bible Scholar," in *Essays on the Context, Nature, and Influence of Isaac Newton's Theology*, ed. J. E. Force and R. H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990), 103–18.

26. J. E. Force, *William Whiston, Honest Newtonian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 113–19.

27. C. D. A. Leighton, "The Enlightened Religion of Robert Clayton," *Studia Hibernica*, no. 29 (1995–7): 157–84.

28. See C. Garrett, "Joseph Priestley, the Millennium and the French Revolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34 (1973): 51–66, and J. Fruchtman, "Joseph Priestley and Early English Zionism," *Enlightenment and Dissent*, no. 2 (1983): 39–46.

29. H. Reventlow, *Bibelautorität und Geist der Moderne: die Bedeutung des Bibelverständnisses für die geistesgeschichtliche und politische Entwicklung in England von der Reformation bis zur Erklärung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1980). Available in English under the title, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (London: SCM, 1984).

30. See, for example, Robert Thorpe, *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of Northumberland, in April, 1798 . . .* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1798), 16–18, and *A Sermon Preached at the Archidiaconal Visitations . . . of the Archdeaconry of Northumberland . . . 1803 . . .* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1803), 5–6.

subordinate role. Others declined to acknowledge a fundamental distinction between prophecy and miracles. As the archdeacon of Stafford and well-known philologist, Robert Nares, put it:

Prophecy may be usefully characterized as *a miracle of which the testimony remains in itself*. It is a miracle, because to foretell events, to which . . . no train of probabilities points, is as much beyond the power of human agents, as to cure diseases with a word, or even to raise the dead. But that actions of the latter kind were ever performed can be proved, at a distant period, only by witnesses, against whose testimony cavils may be raised . . . But the man who reads a prophecy, and perceives the corresponding event, is *himself* the witness of the miracle . . .<sup>31</sup>

Its miraculous nature constituted the chief element in prophecy's apologetic use; but it did not constitute the whole of it. Use was made, for example, of the prophetic literature in the construction of responses, involving notions of development in religion, to the Deist objection to the particularity of the Judeo-Christian revelation.<sup>32</sup> In view of the central and pervasive role of thought on prophetic topics in the eighteenth century, the inclination of the clerical mind towards utilizing them in the interpretation of "the extraordinary events *now passing before our eyes*" in the last decade of the century proved irresistible.<sup>33</sup>

To the strength and prestige of the existing apocalyptic tradition must be ascribed the very limited nature of its nevertheless noteworthy revision in this period. There were orthodox Anglican apocalypticists who, even in the midst of their denunciations of Enlightenment infidelity, saw in this no supernaturally directed evil such as was evident in Popery.<sup>34</sup> Only some had become much more concerned with the former, though even these retained some sympathy for and expressed some approval of those who stuck to the more traditional interpretations.<sup>35</sup> Henry Kett, for example, had already displayed his anti-Enlightenment preoccupations, in particular with Gibbon and Priestley, in the Bampton Lectures of 1790<sup>36</sup> and the preface to his *History the Interpreter of Prophecy* made plain that it was these that had induced him to write the work. However, Kett was thinking and working within an academic tradition and bound to the work of his predecessors. What thus emerged was merely a modification of the traditional understanding of the nature of the Antichrist. The "infidel power", the character of which was exposed in the

31. Robert Nares, *A Connected and Chronological View of the Prophecies relating to the Christian Church: . . . at the lecture founded by . . . William Warburton . . .* (London, 1805), 24. Cf., for example, William Van Mildert, *An Historical View of the Rise and Progress of Infidelity: . . . in a series of sermons preached for the lecture founded by . . . Robert Boyle . . .* 4th ed., Vol. 2 (London, 1831), 346.

32. Hitchin, 127–9.

33. Kett, 1:v.

34. See, for example, E[dward] W[illiam] Whitaker, *A General and Connected View of the Prophecies . . .* (Egham, Sur., 1795). See especially pp. 260–2.

35. George Stanley Faber, *A Dissertation on the Prophecies . . . relative to the . . . Papal and Mohammedan Apostasies . . . [and] the Tyrannical Reign of the Antichrist, or the Infidel Power . . .* 2nd ed. (London, 1807), 1:xi.

36. Henry Kett, *Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford . . . in the Year MDCCXC . . .* 2nd ed. (London, 1792).



third volume of the work, was a new “form” or “branch” of the Antichristian power which had previously manifested itself as Popery and Islam, and with these a considerable, though not the greater, part of the second volume was concerned. George Faber went somewhat further than Kett and actually refused the name “Antichrist” to Popery. This perhaps sprang merely from the methodology adopted, since it was a cardinal principle with Faber that a prophetic symbol could bear only one historical meaning — and the Antichrist was the French Republic.<sup>37</sup> Inevitably, there were those who were shocked by an apparently favourable disposition towards Popery. Faber, however, found a defender who pointed out to them, quite accurately, “that he applies all the principal prophecies . . . to that corrupt system, much in the same way as those who have identified it with Antichrist.”<sup>38</sup>

In some degree, however, this modification of the apocalyptic tradition was indicative of a change, albeit ultimately not a portentous one, in the British *ancien régime*'s ideological structure. In the case of Bishop Horsley, the denial that the Pope was Antichrist was accompanied by a real sympathy with Catholics, founded on High Church doctrinal positions and manifested in political action on their behalf.<sup>39</sup> Such manifestation of good will towards Catholicism is not remarkable for the period. The numerical position of Catholics in Ireland, the relief acts and the associated suggestions about government involvement in Catholic affairs, and the sharpened conflict with heterodox Dissenters all encouraged some Catholics in the 1780s to think of themselves as natural allies of and even potential sharers in the ecclesiastical establishment.<sup>40</sup> To this there was some positive Anglican response. Anglican goodwill became palpable as Britain and Catholicism both engaged in their battle against the Revolution. Such goodwill was widespread, as the sums raised by the Church of England's clergy for their distressed *émigré* brethren indicate.<sup>41</sup> The hopes entertained by such men as the Irish Catholic pamphleteer, Arthur O'Leary, or Archbishop Butler of Cashel for a plural establishment, which might indeed have averted the crisis of the English *ancien régime* in the 1820s and 1830s, ultimately proved delusive. For from the opening years of the new century the expression of sentiments sympathetic to Catholicism was increasingly eclipsed by Protestant zeal.<sup>42</sup> The fundamental explanation of this lies in the limited degree of change in the evaluation of Catholicism which the Anglican theological tradition allowed and this is well illustrated by the case of apocalyptic exegesis.

37. Faber, I:xviii–xx.

38. *Christian Observer* 6 (1807): 19.

39. Mather, chap. 6.

40. C. D. A. Leighton, *Catholicism in a Protestant Kingdom: a Study of the Irish Ancien Régime* (Basingstoke, Hants.: Macmillan, 1994), chap. 8.

41. W. Gibson, *Church, State and Society, 1760–1850*. (Basingstoke, Hants.: Macmillan, 1994), 50–1.

42. J. J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, c.1760–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chap. 9.



## III

Almost all who have adverted to the orthodox Anglican apocalypticism of this period have made reference to its origins in conspiracy theory explanations of the French Revolution, mentioning the works, published in 1797, of the French *émigré* priest, Augustin Barruel, and the professor of natural philosophy at Edinburgh, John Robison. A conspiracy conducted by Bavarian Illuminati and French *philosophes* easily became a supernaturally directed conspiracy. However, the theme of the Revolution as conspiracy was widespread well before the efforts of these writers appeared. Further, the theme of conspiracy in general was one of central importance in Britain's *ancien régime* ideology.

It was the approach of war which drew out what are probably the clearest manifestations of the widespread inclination to perceive current events as the product of conspiracy. The creation in late 1792 of the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers gave the opportunity to subjects of very diverse condition to express both their loyalty and their anxieties.<sup>43</sup> The voluminous correspondence of the association, from all parts of the kingdom and even abroad, reveals both an already existing belief in revolutionary conspiracy and the fundamental attitudes which predisposed many to perceive it. Inevitably, there are references to French spies and disclosures "that the officers in the Guards are to a man democratic" and that the revolution was to commence in a month.<sup>44</sup> Also noteworthy, however, is the clear tendency to regard the American, the French and the incipient British revolutions as a single phenomenon. Again, there are numerous indications of an inability to perceive the strength of the argumentation of the republicans and levellers and the seriousness of discontents. With such a view, conspiracy alone could provide explanation. Even when this was not the case, references to popular grievances combined with warnings about the use of them likely to be made by plotting incendiaries.<sup>45</sup>

This tendency to seek and discover conspiracy should not be seen as simply a further manifestation of the undoubtedly prevalent war fever. It was equally the product of the patterns of habitual thinking in Britain in the eighteenth century, or, for that matter, throughout the early modern period, which rested on apocalyptic theology.<sup>46</sup> The theme of the elect nation providentially delivered from popish and, most recently, Jacobite conspiracy had

43. E. C. Black, *The Association: British Extraparliamentary Political Organization, 1769–1793*. Harvard Historical Monographs, Vol. 54. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), chap. 7. See also A. Mitchell, "The Association Movement of 1792–3," *Historical Journal* 4 (1961): 56–77 and Dickinson, 517–23.

44. British Library, Add. MS 16, 919, fols. 93–4 and 123–4 and Add. MS 16, 920, fol. 21v.

45. See, for example, BL, Add. MS 16, 919, fols. 1–2, 67v and 148–51 and Add. MS 16, 920, fols. 17–20.

46. For the prevalence of conspiracy beliefs in the seventeenth century, see, for example, R. Clifton, "The Popular Fear of Catholics During the English Revolution," *Past and Present*, no. 52 (1971): 23–55, and J. Kenyon, *The Popish Plot* (Harmondsworth, Mddx.: Penguin, 1974).

been endlessly elaborated in literature and in ecclesiastical and civil liturgy.<sup>47</sup> It is thus unsurprising that the British success in the struggle against the forces evoked by the “systematic and impious design [of the *philosophes*] . . . for the destruction of the faith in Christ Jesus” should take its place with those other providential deliverances of God’s new Israel, observable in surveying its history since the Reformation.<sup>48</sup>

The existence of a long-standing, native British inclination to perceive conspiracies does much to explain the success of the publications of Barruel and Robison. Nevertheless, the works of the *émigré* Barruel and of Robison, whose views sprang from Continental experience and sources,<sup>49</sup> were themselves of undoubted importance. For they developed an existing tendency, encouraged by Burke with his emphasis on the role of the *philosophes* in fomenting the Revolution,<sup>50</sup> to focus the search for conspiracy on the European mainland’s Enlightenment.<sup>51</sup> The shift in the emphasis in Anglican apocalyptic away from Rome and Constantinople towards Paris has its origin much less in the war than in this new focus. What essentially divided those who maintained that only in these last days had the true identity of Antichrist been manifested from those who were content with older identifications, was the seriousness with which the former regarded the influence of the Enlightenment. For such as Faber, what had occurred in France was a manifestation of a profound evil<sup>52</sup>: for those who disagreed with him, those events “were both too much the effects of mere contemporary phrenzy and infatuation and too much confined to the leaders of a comparatively small party” to be so regarded.<sup>53</sup>

An inclination to focus on the continental Enlightenment is particularly evident in Kett’s apocalyptic work, though his earlier assault on Gibbon and Priestley indicates that, accurately, his hostility was to the later Enlightenment. Kett’s *bêtes noires*, or, more precisely, his two horns of that “other beast coming up out of the earth” (Rev. 13:11), were the “French Sophists” and the Bavarian Illuminati.<sup>54</sup> However, he was clearly too much attached to

47. D. Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989).

48. Henry William [Majendie], *Sermon Preached before the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, in the Abbey Church of Westminster . . . June 1, 1802 . . .* (London, 1802), 5–14. For further exemplification of the integration of the theme of Enlightenment conspiracy (and apocalyptic belief) with traditional providentialist thought, see Bishop Jacob [Mountain], *A Sermon Preached at Quebec, on . . . January 10th, 1799 . . .* (Quebec, 1799).

49. Robison’s conspiracy was a Masonic one; but he at once made it clear that he spoke against British Masonry not at all. John Robison, *Proofs of a Conspiracy against All the Religions and Governments of Europe . . .* 3rd. ed. (Philadelphia, 1798), 5, 11.

50. Burke’s view of the Revolution as conspiracy is contextualized sensibly by Michael Freeman in *Edmund Burke and the Critique of Political Radicalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), chap. 10.

51. Had there been greater familiarity with continental sources, other versions of the conspiracy theory of the origins of the Revolution might have preceded Barruel and Robison. See BL, Add. MS 16, 921, fols. 42–3, where a proposal is made to the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property to translate a Dutch version of a revelation of the Enlightenment as conspiracy by the Austrian writer Leopold Hoffmann.

52. *Christian Observer* 6 (1807): 151.

53. *Christian Observer* 5 (1806): 620.

54. Kett, 3: 43–103.

that "holy alliance" formed between Anglicanism and the early Enlightenment<sup>55</sup> to hold to a consistent Counter-Enlightenment position. There was praise, albeit qualified, for the thinkers of the early Enlightenment. "Such men were sceptics, not atheists — republicans, not anarchists — admirers of virtue, science and freedom." However, the seeds which they planted had produced a rank growth.<sup>56</sup> Kett even excupated the English Deists from the creation of contemporary infidelity. England "as a nation . . . [did not] deserve this opprobrium." Infidelity's true origin lay in seventeenth-century Continental philosophy, which sprang, by way of reaction, from popish licentiousness and obscurantism<sup>57</sup>: the second beast drew his power from "the first beast before him" (Rev. 13:12).

If other apocalypticists did not focus as firmly on the continent as Kett did, they nevertheless utilized the new emphasis. Revelations of the conspiratorial world of German Freemasons or that of the Parisian *philosophes* (the militant *petite troupe* described by Peter Gay<sup>58</sup>), could now support beliefs, again not altogether unjustified,<sup>59</sup> in native Socinian conspiracy. Like others, many of whom had their apocalyptic inclinations thus strengthened, the veteran Hutchinsonian apologist for High Church orthodoxy, William Jones of Nayland, immediately derived a domestic application from Burke's account of the origin of the French evil.

Read that part of Mr Burke's book attentively, in which he describes the policy of the French Atheists to gain the direction of the public opinion. Just such have been the proceedings of our infidels and Dissenters; who have been so neglected by the supineness of the honest party, that it is miraculous they have not already overthrown us.<sup>60</sup>

Even Kett referred to domestic manifestations of the Europe-wide evil, when he pointed out that in Britain "the doctrines of modern Socinianism were found to be the most effectual means of propagating Infidelity; especially among the Dissenters."<sup>61</sup> If this or the claim made by another writer that the Dissenters' academy at Hackney was presided over by Illuminati<sup>62</sup> have an absurd appearance, it might be pointed out that this was but to say, albeit in hostile form, what has been explained by a number of modern historians: that heterodox rationalist Dissent constituted a, or even the, major vehicle of the Enlightenment in England and as such was a major element in the formation

55. J. Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of Enlightenment: Science, Religion and Politics From the Restoration to the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

56. Kett, 3: 48.

57. Kett, 3: 21–2.

58. P. Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism*, 2 Vols. (New York: Knopf, 1966) 1: 6–8.

59. Mather, 81–3.

60. William Jones to Thomas Percy [the younger], 7 December 1790. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS 49813, fol. 45r. See also fol. 47.

61. Kett, 3: 64.

62. Anti-Jacobin, *New Lights on Jacobinism, Abstracted from Professor Robison's History of Free Masonry* . . . (Birmingham, 1798), 43.

of the secular radicalism emerging in the era of the French wars.<sup>63</sup> If Burke resolved to expose the rationalist Dissenters to the "hatred, ridicule and contempt of the whole world,"<sup>64</sup> it was not petty spite that induced him to do so. This in itself is sufficient to explain the tendency of orthodox apocalypticists to identify rationalist Dissent as the religion of Antichrist. However, the widespread belief in the conspiratorial nature of anti-Trinitarian Dissent did much to confirm the identification. The correspondents of the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property may again be consulted for evidence of the existence of this particular form of fear of conspiracy.<sup>65</sup> However, they were merely echoing a well-established point. Anglican writers of the 1780s had not been slow to draw attention to the injudicious claim of Joseph Priestley that the nation abounded with his co-religionists,

at present concealed, but ready, on a proper occasion to declare: that a mine is laid under the old building of error and superstition, which a single spark may, and probably soon will, inflame, so as to produce an instantaneous explosion.<sup>66</sup>

Priestley no doubt regretted a rhetorical turn which allowed his name thereafter to be popularly linked with such a memorable part of English Protestant mythology as the Gunpowder Plot; it was turned against him by — among many others — Sir William Dobden, who represented the University of Oxford, in the 1787 parliamentary debate on the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and, in 1790, by Burke. Hostility to anti-Trinitarian Dissenters and fear of conspiracy among them became a sometimes violent campaign in the early 1790s<sup>67</sup> and the sentiments which made it so remained visible in the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property.

It was, though, the apocalyptic tradition itself, rather than the related propensity to seek out conspiracy, which chiefly allowed the identification of rationalist Dissent as Antichristianism. For it identified Socinianism, or more generally its early eighteenth-century predecessor, Arianism,<sup>68</sup> with, not of course the Papacy, but the other Antichristian power, Islam. In 1791, John Whitaker, the historian and rector of Ruan Lanihorne in Cornwall,<sup>69</sup> made his ponderous contribution to the case Samuel Horsley, by now bishop of St David's, had advanced against the Socinians, represented by Priestley, in the 1780s.<sup>70</sup>

63. Clark, chap. 5; M. Fitzpatrick, "Heretical Religion and Radical Political Ideas in Late Eighteenth-Century England," in Hellmuth, ed., 339–72; M. Philp, "Rational Religion and Political Radicalism in the 1790s," *Enlightenment and Dissent*, no. 4 (1985): 35–46.

64. Quoted in Goodwin, 93.

65. See, for example, the identification of the "disaffected Party" in his city by a Liverpool newspaper editor. BL, Add. MS 16, 920, fol. 14r.

66. George Horne, *A Sermon Preached at the Primary Visitation of the Most Reverend John [Moore], Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, in the Cathedral . . . on . . . July 1, 1786 . . .*, 2nd. ed. (London, 1787), 11–12.

67. Goodwin, 67–68, 84, 96.

68. This more moderate form of anti-Trinitarianism retained some devotees in the late eighteenth century. Most notably, there was Richard Price, who provoked Burke's *Reflections*. See D. O. Thomas, *The Honest Mind: The Thought and Work of Richard Price* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). See especially pp. 34–40.

69. H. M. Brown, "The High Church Tradition in Cornwall, 1662–1831," *Church Quarterly Review* 150 (1950): 69–80, 75, 78–9.

70. Mather, chap. 4.

Curiously for a work entitled *The Origin of Arianism Disclosed*, it lacked any discussion of the fourth century. Instead, it passed directly from a demonstration of the manner in which Judaism in the early Christian centuries had rejected its earlier Trinitarian belief<sup>71</sup> to a discussion of Islam, depicted as the expression of this rejection.<sup>72</sup> Thereafter, Whitaker's concern was with

that grand impostor . . . who has made the name of MAHOMET to be nearly consonant to that of ANTICHRIST, in the ears of every true Christian; and who has become the father of a new and numerous race of *Arians*, in the earth. *His* Scripture is one grand system of Arianism.<sup>73</sup>

He did not, however, in the closing sections of his work, neglect to treat of "the Judaical and Mahometan Christians among ourselves."<sup>74</sup> This identification of contemporary anti-Trinitarianism with Islam was by no means new: it had been commonplace since the emergence of the Trinitarian debates in the 1690s.<sup>75</sup>

The continuing and increasing importance of rationalist Dissent in the orthodox mind may partly account for the strength of the interest shown in Islam by orthodox apocalypticists of the era of the French wars. Of course, it was an important element in the apocalyptic tradition anyway and further interest was awakened by the Middle East, and particularly Palestine, becoming a theatre of war. Faber, for example, thought it extraordinarily interesting that there was a temporal coincidence "between the Sultan's losing of the holy city, and the Pope's deprivation of his temporalities"; for this corresponded with the temporal coincidence he believed existed between the rise of Islam and that of the Papacy.<sup>76</sup> However, the concern with rational Dissent is also clearly in evidence in Faber. Thus, in his account of the origins of Islam, he diverges considerably from his sources in giving a much stronger emphasis to heretical Christian influence on Muhammad and in characterizing that influence as the product of "antitrinitarian venom."<sup>77</sup>

#### IV

The revelation of the European mainland's conspiracy against Christianity and its social order by Barruel and Robison served to turn the largely merely non-Enlightenment apocalyptic tradition into a possible vehicle of Counter-Enlightenment polemic. What emerged was not merely an increased hostility to the continental Enlightenment, but the Enlightenment as experienced in England also. For the most part, it was a moderate Counter-Enlightenment

71. Whitaker was here building on the work of Pierre Allix, a Huguenot theologian, who had argued for the existence of such a belief.

72. John Whitaker, *The Origin of Arianism Disclosed* (London, 1791), chap. 4.

73. Whitaker, 335.

74. Whitaker, 505.

75. J. A. I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 102–20.

76. George Faber to Arthur Young, 27 July 1809. BL, Add. MS 35, 130, fols. 285–6. See also Mather, 262–3.

77. Faber, 2:32–34. Cf. Humphrey Prideaux, *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Displayed in the Life of Mahomet . . .* (London, 1697), 40–7. Faber makes it clear that he is also diverging from Bishop Newton on this matter.

stance that was adopted. Kett was not alone in retaining some sympathy for the early, English Enlightenment. Archdeacon Robert Thorp of Northumberland, for example, clearly denounced both the continental Enlightenment and the English Deists, but suggested that the antidote to such views was to be found in such writers as Bacon, Barrow, Locke, Boyle, and Newton. For "[t]he progress of learning and science has at all times been nearly connected with the advancement of true religion."<sup>78</sup> However, the most original, wide-ranging and profound of the English Counter-Enlightenment works which were influenced by conspiracy theory showed few such inconsistencies. This was the *Rise and Progress of Infidelity*, the Boyle Lectures of 1802 to 1805, delivered by William Van Mildert, the future Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford and bishop of Durham. It was the work which established the theological reputation of the most notable High Churchman of the pre-Tractarian era.<sup>79</sup> He was to write — and do — a great deal more. However, when the well-known ecclesiastical writer, George Townsend, preached the eulogy on the occasion of Van Mildert's death, it was his writing of this book which was singled out as the bishop's greatest achievement. Its excellence, Townsend held, lay in its assault on the fundamental fault of the age — the acceptance of the epistemological assertions of the Enlightenment.<sup>80</sup>

The requirements of the Boyle lectureship enabled Van Mildert to break free of the exegetical form in which apocalyptic was usually expressed. The twelve sermons which made up the second volume of the study put forward a positive statement of an orthodox Christian position in the central Enlightenment debate — as historians of philosophy have usually perceived it — about the relationship of faith and reason. This was an expression of the tradition derived from the thought of the early eighteenth-century natural philosopher, John Hutchinson. Van Mildert had apparently no interest in Hutchinson's biblically derived cosmology<sup>81</sup>; but he was interested in other aspects of Hutchinsonianism and entirely accepted its attack on natural theology. As well as the conventional defence of the historical credibility of the Christian revelation, Van Mildert's chief themes were the inability of the human mind to attain to truth of importance without the aid of revelation and the moral culpability — derived from sins of intellectual pride — of rejecting it. Here, both in the attack on rationalism itself and in the positive assertion that truth of any importance sprang from the will and not the intellect, was a comprehensive challenge to the epistemological basis of the Enlightenment's claim to a right of private judgment and, inevitably, its claims about the institutional location of authoritative knowledge.<sup>82</sup>

78. Thorp, *Charge*, 1798, 7–13.

79. E. A. Varley, *The Last of the Prince Bishops: William Van Mildert and the High Church movement of the early nineteenth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 45.

80. George Townsend, *Infidelity not an Involuntary Error, but a Wilful Sin . . .* (Durham, 1836), 9–14.

81. It is this aspect of Hutchinsonian thought which has attracted most attention from historians. For a wider view of Hutchinsonianism, see C. D. A. Leighton, "Hutchinsonianism: A Counter-Enlightenment Reform movement," *Journal of Religious History* 23 (1999): 168–84.

82. Champion, 10.

It was on this basis that Van Mildert's apocalyptically oriented view of human history, put forward in the first volume of his work, was constructed. The necessary presupposition of this view, pointed out by Robert Pattison as a fundamental conviction of Newman which rendered him a radical critic of characteristically modern thought, "that belief, freely chosen and willfully pursued, is the source of all human action,"<sup>83</sup> was clearly in evidence in Van Mildert. History was shaped by dogmas, true and false; but much of this belief, that part constituted by "the several Systems of error and impiety from time to time obtruded on the world,"<sup>84</sup> was sinful. Thus an idealist view of history became an apocalyptic one also. The conflict of ideas was the chief manifestation of the "contest to be perpetually maintained, between the Redeemer and the Destroyer of souls,"<sup>85</sup> now reaching its conclusion in the Enlightenment.

It is, however, more than the apocalyptic framework, resting on the constantly illustrated identification of error as sin, which holds together the assault on what Van Mildert's biographer calls "[i]ncorrect religious notions of all shades."<sup>86</sup> In fact, his work is far more focused than this remark suggests. Though its remarks relate to all periods, literally from creation to the end of the world, it is quite consistently an attack on the Enlightenment of both the *philosophes* and their English Arian and Socinian equivalents or, at least, this Enlightenment as the contemporary manifestation of perennial evil. Modern historiography's concern with temporal specificity was not shared by Van Mildert, whose theological mind sought out doctrinal identity in the phenomena of the past. A recent commentator on Newman has remarked on the difficulty encountered in dealing with his treatment of heretical movements of earlier centuries "to see where academic activity ends and polemic [against contemporary heresy] begins."<sup>87</sup> The same remark might be made about any of the historical writings in the vast christological conflict at the centre of the English Enlightenment debate. For the participants in this conflict, it was not that there were new battles to be fought with reference to previous ones: there was but one battle. In view of their belief that dogma determines history and not the reverse, this lack of attention to temporal specificity is at least understandable.

The purpose of Van Mildert's polemic against Judaism in the early part of the *Rise and Progress of Infidelity* is easily understood in the light of his identification of Whitaker as "a masterly writer of our own times." Discussion of Judaism was the preliminary to the discussion of Islam, the "most prominent feature" of which was Arianism.<sup>88</sup> However, though Van Mildert's discussion of the history of early Christianity did wish to make clear that "the

83. R. Pattison, *The Great Dissent: John Henry Newman and the Liberal Heresy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 118.

84. Van Mildert, 1:10.

85. Van Mildert, 1:1.

86. Varley, 43.

87. S. Thomas, *Newman and Heresy: The Anglican Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 4.

88. Van Mildert, 1:202.



Jews were unceasing in their efforts to stimulate the Heathen to . . . perpetual warfare with Truth,"<sup>89</sup> it was just as concerned to draw attention to the activities of "the inflated and proud Philosophers, who had acquired, and were resolutely determined to maintain, possession of the public ear."<sup>90</sup> From time to time, lest the reader should fail to note the identity of ancient and modern wickedness, explicit references to the latter were introduced, as, for example, in a comparison of Julian the Apostate and Frederick the Great<sup>91</sup> or in comment on Socinian commendation of Islam.<sup>92</sup>

As Van Mildert moved into a treatment of the Middle Ages, he did digress from his anti-Enlightenment themes, though only a little, in order to condemn Popery. However, he pointed out that "[t]hrough the medium of Popery, the Church was still preserved" in possession of the Apostolic Succession and the Sacraments.<sup>93</sup> The contrast with Islam's destruction of Christianity left little doubt to which of the two ideological challengers, Popery and rationalist heterodoxy, to the Anglican church/state Van Mildert was more hostile. Popery, he held, did participate in the character of the Antichrist, but only "inasmuch as it's [*sic*] tendency to propagate error and delusion has manifestly had the effect of promoting an absolute *apostacy* from the Faith."<sup>94</sup> Accordingly, it was only when, in the latter part of his historical survey, Van Mildert spoke of the Enlightenment directly that his tone became truly apocalyptic. As, over a series of chapters, he considered modern infidelity in its sixteenth-century roots, its seventeenth-century development and its eighteenth-century flowering, at each stage showing rationalism's ability to gratify sinful inclinations to pride and self-sufficiency and consequently its character as "the instrument which, of all others, the great Enemy of Mankind has most frequently employed in his service,"<sup>95</sup> it was made plain to the reader that that biblical era in which "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" was upon them. (2 Tim. 3:13) However, it was not quite this which heralded the end. The end had rather been heralded by the "last grand attack which has been made on the Gospel," inducing even the lower orders of society to abandon Christianity. As for Faber, the consummation of evil lay in the French Revolution, the product of the machinations of the Illuminati, rather than in the Enlightenment itself.<sup>96</sup>

If the treatment of the late eighteenth century by the *Rise and Progress of Infidelity* did show a degree of interest in the European mainland generated by the Robison/Barruel conspiracy theory, this was peripheral to the work as a whole, which was very decidedly English. Van Mildert was pondering on continental events only a little and as a participant in the Hutchinsonian and the English apocalypticist traditions. In contrast to Kett, the Enlightenment

89. Van Mildert, 1:130.

90. Van Mildert, 1:127.

91. Van Mildert, 1:174 and 382–5.

92. Van Mildert, 1:207–8 and 221–4.

93. Van Mildert, 1:235.

94. Van Mildert, 1:313.

95. Van Mildert, 1:300.

96. Van Mildert, 1:394–404.

which he was attacking was the English one. Though he was of the opinion that modern infidelity had its origins in France and Italy and that in his own day France had surpassed England in its wickedness, the crucial development of infidelity had taken place in England. Van Mildert's "three great Impostors" — in the Enlightenment tradition, Moses, Christ, and Muhammad — were Herbert of Cherbury, Hobbes, and Spinoza. The French Enlightenment was derivative, such writers as Voltaire owing much to "the mischievous performances of our countrymen."<sup>97</sup>

## V

The English character of Van Mildert's work illustrates again the central contention of the present study, that the Anglican apocalypticists of which it has spoken are to be read chiefly in the light of an understanding of native traditions and domestic circumstances, albeit that external military, political, and intellectual threats did act as a catalyst for their apocalyptic reflection, preaching, and writing. Reference only to the latter provides a superficial and inadequate explanation of the phenomenon. It is the former which explain how historical events came to be perceived as an apocalyptic crisis. This development is to be explained, at the level of intellectual history, chiefly with reference to the continuing vigour of the English traditions of apocalyptic exegesis and Counter-Enlightenment argumentation, in particular that directed against rationalist christological heresy. The two were by the early eighteenth century already, in a degree, connected, by virtue of the former's depiction of Islam as Antichristianism and as an expression of christological heresy, though the very existence of Arian and Socinian apocalyptic makes it clear that this link was not strong. Related to these intellectual traditions were widespread popular dispositions, which assisted both in creating the environment from which apocalyptic emerged and in facilitating its reception. In particular, there was the disposition to an anxiety generated by the perceived conspiratorial nature of both Catholicism and Socinianism.

Since these intellectual traditions and popular dispositions were important elements in the constitution of the ideology of the English *ancien régime*, the apocalypticism they assisted in engendering bears clear witness to the vigour and productive character of that ideology as it faced new and eventually triumphant enemies. It also, however, bears witness, in its continuing harshness towards Catholicism, to an inflexibility in that ideology. The Catholic relief acts and a common hatred of the Revolution gave an opportunity for a real rapprochement with Catholicism, which was almost seized. The Anglican apocalyptic interpretation of the Revolution might have proved another point of contact with Catholic sentiment. English Catholics did often share the "enlarged interpretation" of biblical prophecy favoured by their Protestant fellow countrymen: such an interpretation by Bishop Walmesley, the vicar

97. Van Mildert, 1:369–71 and 385–6.

apostolic of the Western District, proved extremely popular.<sup>98</sup> Others showed a willingness to fit the events of the Revolutionary era into such a scheme.<sup>99</sup> In fact, Anglican anti-Revolutionary apocalyptic, maintaining much of its anti-Catholic character, proved incapable of forming an element in a reconciliation. In this, it reflected a failure of the English *ancien régime*'s ideology as a whole. If it was the Catholic question rather than radicalism which should be regarded as the nemesis of the English *ancien régime*,<sup>100</sup> we may conclude that this failure proved fatal.

98. Charles Walmesley [Sig. Pastorini, pseud.], *The General History of the Christian Church* . . . 2nd ed. (London, 1798). The work first appeared in 1771. There were seven Irish and five American editions and issues. It was also translated into Latin, French, Italian and German.

99. See, for example, [Peter Jenkins], *Cursory Observations on the Divine Authority of the Catholic Church* . . . (Bury St Edmunds, 1804), 1–4.

100. This case is argued in Clark, 283–420.